

Whether these nests were the work of the same cock or not, it is impossible to say.

Mr. E. G. Herbert in his paper on the Nests and Eggs of Birds in Central Siam (*Journ. Siam Soc., Nat. Hist.*, vol. vi, 1923-1926), which Mr. Van der Meer Mohr quotes, also refers to 'double' nests of Weaver Birds observed by him—in this instance a new nest built under an old one.

Mr. Cripps writing on the nesting of the Eastern Baya (*Ploceus megarhynchus*), Hume's *Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds*, second edition, vol. ii, p. 119) says: 'I have on several occasions found a second nest commenced from the bottom of the tube of the old one, the upper nest being useless as the passage is closed up.' This peculiarity in the nest building of our Weaver Birds noted by many observers may perhaps offer a clue to the origin of the great communal nests of the Social Weaver Birds (*Philothærus socius*) of South Africa. These wonderful nests built of grass and twigs are composed of numerous separate chambers for housing individual families. The birds do not occupy the same compartments every year, but at the return of the breeding season build new nests under the old ones. Thus the aggregated mass increase in size and may contain more than one or two hundred separate chambers. From building separate nests these Weaver Birds may have passed to the stage of joining a few nests together and in course of time was thus evolved the present gigantic structure with its common roof and its component cubicles for the housing of a few hundred families. The material used, the site and the plan of construction adopted, the circumstances and conditions under which these birds built their nests and the effective protection they obtained being the factors which directed and favoured the intenser development of the social habit and the evolution of this particular type of nest architecture as the one most beneficial to the preservation and continuity of the species.

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY. S. H. PRATER, C.M.Z.S.

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#### XIV.—PLACE OF THE JAVA SPARROW (*MUNIA ORYZIVORA* L.) IN THE INDIAN AVIFAUNA.

*Munia oryzivora* (Linn.) attracts notice more as a cage-bird than one which, given its freedom, can thrive and readily acclimatise itself in other than its native habitat. The case of such liberated individuals is not unknown in the annals of Indian ornithology. The introduced species is looked upon as only an exotic form—an escape from the cage. Half a century ago, Blyth mentioned the occurrence of *Munia oryzivora* (Linn.) in the Mergui Province (Burma). Jerdon, Hume and Oates found the bird common enough and nesting wild near Madras. Legge recorded its acclimatisation in Ceylon. A species which had to its credit a record of successes in introducing and maintaining its hold in new situations and under varying circumstances in many parts of China, Japan, Siam, Cochin China, the

Malay Archipelago, Mauritius, the Zanzibar Coast and other localities, would naturally raise high hopes in the mind of Oates as regards its rapid multiplication in the jungles of British Burma. The problem arises what would *now* be the status of *Munia oryzivora* (Linn.) in relation to India's native avifauna? Will the success of its introduction or the extent at its present stage of its naturalisation in this country warrant its inclusion in the permanent list of the Indian avifauna? Oates who edited the first edition of *F.B.I.* (Birds) was merely content with an allusion to this bird in a foot-note. Apparently it was premature then to take for granted its Indian domicile. Almost half a century has since gone by. From published records during this period one finds hardly any light on its movements. A new edition of *F.B.I.* (Birds) has been called forth, and in it, unhappily for *Munia oryzivora* (Linn.), Mr. Stuart Baker has not a word to say, nay, he has thought fit to delete even the former foot-note of Oates. Has the bird then lost its foothold and failed completely in its effort to cope with Indian conditions? The bird 'appears to be acclimatised near Madras', writes Mr. W. E. Wait in 1925 in his *Manual of Birds of Ceylon*, though round Colombo it seems to him not quite as flourishing as in Legge's time. Very recently near Calcutta (10 miles to its north), I have under observation a colony of these Munias whose favourite resort is a shrubby situation composed of two or three trees embracing each other and overhanging the paddy-stacks put up in the compound of some villagers close to Agarpara railway station (Dist. 24-Parganas). These have not only food within easy reach but also cover and shelter from the hot sun and driving rain. Their hunting ground in the early morning is the surrounding paddy-fields (from which paddy and straw have been removed), where flocks of considerable size will descend and feed on fallen paddy. Their chirrups are now incessantly heard and enliven the country-side. They feed here till about 8 o'clock when they retire to their cover and roost, returning towards afternoon to search for paddy. Wary to a degree, they will, on the least suspicion of danger, hurry away to distant directions, some sheltering themselves in tree-tops and some in thickets and impenetrable reed-beds within *jheels*. Once I found while a bird-catcher spread his net to capture them, the birds on the paddy-fields would keep clear of the trap. Frightened birds while seeking cover among trees will so adjust themselves that one tries in vain to look for them in the self-same tree into which they slip into complete oblivion. Evidently these birds suffer little molestation from the local people, for they will allow me to watch them at close quarters. Great are their chances of persecution, as they are much sought after as cage-birds on account of their pretty colour and attractive qualities, and they enjoy hardly any protection under the legislation of the country. They are quite hardy birds and possessed, as they are, with powerful beaks and no inconsiderable power of flight, apparently run little risk of getting worsted in the struggle for existence. Sparrows will dare not bully them. Rather both will tolerate each other, roosting and feeding in each other's company. I have not yet been able to find out the nesting site of the Munias, but I suspect it lies within the belt of almost impenetrable reeds not far off from their

roosting place. The under-noted measurements are those of three specimens which I could manage, with the aid of a bird-catcher, to snare with bird-lime :—

Locality.	Date.	Wing.	Tail.	Tarsus.	Culmen.
Agarpara ...	... 30-1-31	67	47	19	18 mm.
Do. ...	... 31-1-31	66	46	18·5	17 mm.
Do. ...	... 1-2-31	69	47	19	17 mm.

So little is known about *Munia oryzivora* (L.) introduced into various parts of our country. There is no published record of its occurrence in Bengal. Yet the bird has had some success in its efforts to adjust itself to situations and circumstances unfamiliar to it. Will not this success claim for it a place among India's avifauna? The problem, fascinating as it is, admits of solution by closer observation and concerted effort of the ornithologists in this country.

50, KAILAS BOSE STREET, SATYA CHURN LAW.  
CALCUTTA,  
July 29, 1931.

[In an issue of the *Girl Guides' Magazine*, 1928, under Nature Notes, there is a record of a pair of Java Sparrows nesting near Poona.]

#### XV.—NOTE ON THE BREEDING OF THE INDIAN MOORHEN (*GALLINULA CHLOROPUS PARVIFRONS*).

Sir,

In his article on the Indian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus parvifrons*) in the *Journal*, vol. xxxi, p. 542, Mr. Stuart Baker writes, *à propos* of its nesting, 'Hume seemed to think that they had two broods in the year in the hills, laying first in May and again in the latter half of July but other observers think they have only one set of eggs in the season'. It may be of interest to know that Hume was right, though a little out as to the times of laying.

There is in my garden a large tank, nearly 100 yards square, in the middle of which is a small island, covered and surrounded by a bed of reeds, on which are three or four trees growing. In the tank are several broad belts of white lotus, and there is a certain quantity of water weed of various kinds. The surroundings are quiet and the tank is a sanctuary, which is visited by a number of water birds. Major-General Sir James Johnstone, who was Political Agent fifty years ago, has recorded that geese were to be seen there in his time, and I have seen nine varieties of duck on the tank. Frequently one or two pairs of Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*) breed on the island.